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## MUSIC SCENE: Rising rock star: Knowles set to open for Beck



Davy Knowles

By JAY N. MILLER  
For The Patriot Ledger  
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One of the better musical success stories of 2008 was the emergence of Back Door Slam, a trio of 20-year-olds from England whose debut album "Roll Away" delivered some of the best rock 'n' blues in decades.

But now the trio has split and Davy Knowles, the band's singer/guitarist and songwriter, is opening for British guitar god Jeff Beck, whose tour comes to Boston's House of Blues on Monday night.

Knowles, 21, said opening for a rock and jazz icon like Beck with just an acoustic ax is a challenge indeed. But Knowles likes challenging himself, which is why he wanted to go solo in the first place.

"I've really been getting into a lot of acoustic stuff," Knowles said. "I will never abandon electric guitar, of course. But I have just finished recording my first solo album, and it is mainly acoustic stuff. We always did some of that in Back Door Slam, so I don't think anything on my album will be too much of a surprise for our fans."

Touring with Jeff Beck is a big step up for the young guitarist.

"Apparently Jeff is a huge YouTube fan, and he saw one of my videos that he liked," Knowles said. "His agents got in

touch, since they were looking for a solo acoustic artist to open for him, and they didn't even finish the sentence before I said, 'Yes!' It is a huge honor, and really a challenge."

A challenge that Knowles also called "terrifying."

"It is all kind of surreal. That's been true throughout the few years that Back Door Slam was touring, too: You find yourself onstage with these people you've idolized, and wonder, 'Am I REALLY doing this?' It's a bizarre feeling, but I have been so very lucky."

Knowles acoustic ventures have always been a part of his repertoire, and the Back Door Slam album included several, among them "Stay," a Celtic folk ballad about Brian Garvey, an original Back Door Slam member who died in an auto accident before the band hit it big. Knowles has always displayed an apt touch on acoustic guitar, as well as a manner of crafting affecting lyrics that work well with that type of music.

Knowles' solo CD was produced by Peter Frampton, who plays pretty mean guitar himself. A mutual friend from Nashville suggested Knowles and Frampton work together.

"We wrote three songs together, initially," Knowles said. "And then I managed to rope him into co-producing my album - I was really psyched. Peter's impact was that . . . well . . . mainly he kicked my arse. He's one of my all-time favorites, and to play in front of him was scary. But he has a really great knack of bringing out your best. He pushes you. The songs I wrote with him probably rock more than anything I've ever written."

Along with the solo Knowles album, due in June, there will be another Back Door Slam album. "Live at Bonnaroo" is scheduled to come out Tuesday, and it features several intriguing covers, including Crosby, Still, Nash and Young's "Almost Cut My Hair," and John Hiatt's "Riding with the King."

It seems like the young guitarslinger has no qualms about re-interpreting musical icons, and his versions breathe new fire into them.

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"It didn't start out that we had all that confidence," Knowles said. "We played a lot in bars when we started out, doing three-hour sets a night. We did those songs because we liked them. It's not like we were making a statement by doing them; we just loved the songs. Now we have to be a little bit conscious of not doing them religiously like the originals - there's no doubt Crosby, Stills and Nash could do a better job than us. But for a new, upcoming band that's not widely known, to play all originals is rather tough. We found if you put a couple of covers in there, people get a taste of what you love, and what your own music is striving for, and it makes it all easier for you and the audience. Besides, those are great songs that are really fun to play."

And the neat benefit of opening the Jeff Beck tour is the chance to hear Beck perform every night.

"Oh, it's just wonderful," said Knowles. "I believe 'Blow by Blow' was one of the best guitar albums of all time, and I loved 'Truth' as well. What I most like about Jeff is that he just kept re-inventing himself over and over. I enjoy watching him so much, but you know I'm getting a big kick out of watching his bassist, too. Tal Wilkenfeld is an Australian, and her bass is almost bigger than she is, but she's one of the most amazing musicians I've ever seen. She's a big part of Jeff's show."

As for Knowles' summer tour, can we expect to still hear any of those old Back Door Slam songs? "I will absolutely play some of that stuff," he said. "I'm really proud of that band and our music. It's a big part of who I am. The past couple years have been the best years of our lives, for all three of us. I don't want to exaggerate the situation, but look at Cream, three musicians who sold millions of records together, and still felt the need to move along. That's similar to what happened with Back Door Slam. We just couldn't stay together, although we are all still friends. Our gut instincts were to move on, and it was just a natural evolution."

**LATE DATES:**A bunch of great gigs tonight: Scott Wahlberg and the Fog at Christopher's in Raynham; Rich Danner and the fabulous Mudskippers rock Kilroy's in Quincy. There also is a reunion at Harpers Ferry in Boston of the Mudhens, with Tom Groleau, Pete Chandler and vocalist Carla Ryder of Braintree doing her first show since having twins in November. They open for Tigercity. The Mystix, that sizzling band of Boston-area rock 'n' blues lifers, celebrate their second CD on Saturday at Johnny D's in Somerville. Also Showcase Live in Foxboro welcomes ex-Mavericks lead singer Raul Malo, who was pretty cool on Monday night's Jimmy Kimmel show.

*Jay N. Miller covers music on the South Shore and in the Boston area. If you have information or ideas for Jay about the local music scene send it to him by e-mail to [features@ledger.com](mailto:features@ledger.com). Attn: Music Scene in the subject line.*

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